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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives

Statement submitted by Movement "ni putes ni soumises", a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement*

1. Movement "ni putes ni soumises" was established in 2003 in France after the "March of Women against Ghettos and for Equality", and has been fighting for women's rights with consultative status with ECOSOC since 2007. The Movement has been directed for three years by the Algerian Sihem Habchi, Muslim, feminist and laywomen. We would like to express the following considerations on the fourth report submitted by France before the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

2. Our main campaigns of the year focus on:

(a) Fight against fundamentalism via the burqa: programme called "The ambassadors for equality and secularization";

(b) Education for women living in ghettos and working class neighbourhoods;

(c) Programme for integrating women in the workplace: 100 marraines pour 100 femmes (100 sponsors for 100 women).

3. Our report gives us the opportunity to denounce the appalling pressures suffered by women living in poor working class neighbourhoods and to highlight advances in our field, but more importantly to draw attention to the areas in which public authorities in connection with feminist organizations must invest in further to contribute more effectively to the global emancipation of women.

Report on the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment

Women's emancipation hindered by the burqa

Dramatic inventory of the situation

4. Economic rights such as equality in pay are denied in practice and often women are deprived of social rights such as access to decent housing, the right to education, reproductive health care, employability. The burqa is a critical symbol of a point of no return on the road for the emancipation of women in France. It is the culmination of an archaic vision relegating women to the sexual sphere, and away from economics, society and politics. The burqa symbolizes the pinnacle of a system degrading women that is rooted in our ghettos and poor neighbourhoods: in those places the pressure towards a woman's body constantly increases and even contraception and abortion are challenged in these areas, as virginity is considered to be sacred. Girls often prefer to put contraception behind them rather than risking physical violence and a smeared reputation.

Our response in our field

5. NPNS knows that the emancipation of women is a prerequisite to social progress. The first priority of NPNS in 2010 has been to adamantly support the law to ban the burqa in France, a violence against women that has no place in the world. The movement was consulted repeatedly on the bill, which was adopted by the

* Issued without formal editing.

Senate in September. Equal work opportunities are not available to those who are hidden by a full veil. In partnership with the Minister of Immigration, our programme "The ambassadors for equality and secularization" is sponsoring women to go out into heavily populated low-income neighbourhoods of France to mediate gatherings, not only to discuss the necessity of abolishing the burqa, but also to open a dialogue about other violence against women in our society today.

Education

Inventory of the situation

6. In 2004, republican school was "de-sanctuarized" thanks to the law banishing religious signs in school. But still, the school is the first target of archaic pressures. As usual, girls are the first victims of this non-official system, which degrades their basic rights. The compromise sometimes even pushes teachers to separate boys and girls in courses and gym classes. Consequently, gender equality is becoming the blind spot of the school directors and teachers who often prefer to avoid scandals and crisis. This lack of responsibility sometimes leads to dramatic results, such as collective rapes, abuse, aggression, which oblige us to evaluate the real risks at stake.

Our proposals

7. In order to change those behaviours and be efficient in emergency situations, training the teachers is more and more necessary. We are working hard on a programme, called the "malette pédagogique" — the "educational suitcase", which will help teachers to become better equipped to face such situations.

8. Movement "ni putes ni soumises" is a key player in education for youth, specifically from disadvantaged neighbourhoods all over France. The movement emphasizes the values of secularism, sexual equality and respect through the relationships between girls and boys, values that we pass on to youth.

9. One of the tools we use is the "Guide of respect", a booklet we distribute during school interventions that confronts a variety of issues of oppression and gender discrimination. The sexuality part informs on issues of contraception, STDs, the right to choose a sexual partner, and sexual oppression. In the portion addressing "traditions" it discusses forced or arranged marriages, polygamy. The violence section addresses both physical and the too oft ignored psychological violence. The booklet also provides information on significant laws and informs French youth of rights they may not even know they have.

Training and work ambitions

Inventory of the situation

10. In poor neighbourhoods, women are the first victims of the economic crisis. The only work they are being offered concerns precarious jobs with unsustainable schedules while they are suffering a critical lack of transportation facilities. Job agencies are not concerned with these areas and don't take into consideration the women who often don't speak the language properly, and who didn't have the opportunity to receive academic education and training.

NPNS response

11. NPNS urges action by public officials, who are giving up in those areas for want of resources.

12. The problem of unemployment is further exacerbated for women lacking education or job experience. To face this problem, the movement created "100 marraines pour 100 femmes" (100 sponsors for 100 women). This programme gives women job training with the goal of helping them find long-term employment. This employment is a necessary step in the struggle for women's equality and independence.

13. The programme lasts six months including individual evaluations, coaching, job counselling, and partnership with a company. Stable employment is critical for women in the poorer neighbourhoods of France not only financially, but also in relation to their self-confidence and independence. Women will never be truly equal and emancipated as long as they depend on male breadwinners and/or are trapped in low-skill, dead-end jobs.

Downsides of care

14. As a popular feminist organization, NPNS will not voice solidarity with the ideology of a "care society" that has recently been introduced in France. Such a system is appealing under the facade of universal "well-being", but its base is hypocritical. The ill and elderly would receive care and live comfortably, but exclusively through the service of women. Such a system would relegate women, primarily of the lower class, to the position of carers, thus closing all doors to other opportunities and hindering their chances for further success in the working world.

15. Worldwide, solutions for work and advancement for women are being sought, but the implementation of a care society is not the answer. In some countries Islamic feminists are supporting charities to teach young girls how to take care of husbands and elderly persons. Women are naturally considered as the caregivers for their families, a route that leads them directly to the home, subjugated to the will of men, and which leaves no time or opportunity for responsibility in outside business or society.

International

16. All the fights and the issues we are involved in encourage women from international countries to ask for our help and support. The European current concern about the travelling people's living conditions encourages us to continue the fight for women from these populations. They suffer from a disastrous lack of health care and contraception, and we have supported them publicly, denouncing discrimination in public hospitals and maternity wards.

17. This year has been also a time for focusing on the fight on behalf of Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani. First condemned to death by stoning, and now to be executed by hanging, her treatment by the government of her country has been yet another offensive demonstration of the regime's disregard for the rights of women. For the past three months, we have been fighting for her cause, constantly raising social awareness of her case and organizing three marches in protest against her maltreatment. How can women aspire to excel in the workplace and society when their own government is punishing them on the basis of their gender?

Conclusion

18. NPNS successfully lobbied to make the fight against violence against women the great national cause for 2010. Still, we are deeply concerned about the Millennium Development Goals — especially the third one, which is clearly delayed, aiming at promoting gender equality and women's empowerment.

19. Movement NPNS urges the international community to recognize the necessity for the empowerment of women for further social progress and advancement in the workplace. NPNS works towards female empowerment by educating youth on respect and assisting women to prepare for the professional environment by providing training and workshops. It is unacceptable that women are still not treated as equals by their government and society, therefore NPNS recognizes it is imperative we combat violence and oppression against women in order to achieve large-scale social progress and we call upon ECOSOC member States to address these issues.